

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK

DAHKEEM MILLER, on his own behalf and on behalf of others similarly

others similarly situated, et al.

: Docket #21-cv-02616

Plaintiffs, :

-against-

CITY OF NEW YORK, et al, : New York, New York

September 26, 2024

Defendants.

DRAFT TRANSCRIPT

PROCEEDINGS BEFORE
THE HONORABLE JENNIFER E. WILLIS
UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE

APPEARANCES:

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EXAMINATIONS

Witness Direct Cross Direct Cross
None Re- Re- Cross

EXHIBITS

Exhibit Voir Number Description ID In Dire

THE DEPUTY CLERK: All rise. Judge 1 Jennifer E. Willis is now presiding. Court is now 2 in session. 3 THE COURT: You may be seated. 4 THE DEPUTY CLERK: Good afternoon, Your 5 Honor. 6 7 THE COURT: Good afternoon. THE DEPUTY CLERK: We are here for Miller 8 v. City of New York; Docket Number: 21-cv-2616. We 9 ask the counsels for plaintiff, as well as counsel 10 for defense, please rise and state their names for 11 the record. 12 MR. REINERT: Good afternoon, Your Honor. 13 Alexander Reinert for the plaintiffs. With me at 15 counsel table is Eric Hecker, Alexander Goldenberg 16 and Daniel Mullkoff. THE COURT: Good afternoon. 17 18 MR. SCHEINER: Good afternoon, Your Honor. 19 Alan Scheiner from the New York City Law Department 20 for the defendants. THE COURT: Good afternoon. 21 22 So, as I had indicated during our hearing 23 on the motion last time, because it is the desire 24 and the intention of the parties collectively that

this decision sort of not be used for precedential

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value, and the parties have already agreed that it is not appealable, any order that I file, I don't have the power to tell different recording services not to take that decision and put it wherever they put it in the usual course.

So my thought was that coming here, reading an oral decision into the record, which I would then follow with a very, very abbreviated decision which will merely have the holdings and will reaffirm the fact that both sides have agreed not to appeal, and allow the parties to understand what was clearly a negotiated and intended outcome for the parties that this is the decision.

Reading the due reference of names, because, again, just because it's important to me that the parties understand, I've grappled with the issues that I'm basing my decision on -- you know, on law and reason, and so I haven't -- it's, in fact, not being provided, so I will not keep telling you my rulings and my reasonings.

Challenge to those who signed in other case, denied; City's challenged incarceration, granted, but he conceded and actually served them. So if there's a period of pretrial detainees, then started serving a sentence, then stopped serving

that sentence, it would only be the period of time where they were serving a sentence of incarceration that they would be excluded from the calculation of the class for that time period.

And third, class counsel's challenge to include six individual claimants who had been placed in the contagious disease unit is granted in part and denied in part, and I'll specify which potential -- which claimants are covered when we get there.

So first, I will explain my decision with respect to the general releases. And I want to acknowledge upfront that there are some courts that have enforced releases with the same or similar language as the releases in this case, but there are also courts that have declined to enforce identical releases. New York State has long disfavored general releases and limits their scope to topics contemplated by the parties at the time of executing the releases; see Mangini.

New York has, quote, special rules for evaluating such general releases. Those special rules require the Court to determine whether a release covering unknown claims was, quote, fairly and knowingly made; that's from Fleming.

In making this determination, the Court must employ a totality of the circumstances standard; see Gallo.

Plaintiffs allege that they were indefinitely placed in near-solitary confinement without due process, often for many months, and often with no idea how long this near-solitary confinement would last. Plaintiffs would have had no way of knowing at the time whether this treatment violated any procedures, as alleged in a complaint, and they would not have known that their treatment gave rise to a claim.

Later, some plaintiffs signed releases without any -- potential plaintiffs signed releases without any awareness of the pending potential class action, and under circumstances giving rise to an inference that they only intended to settle the disputes before them. The plaintiffs could not have intended for their releases to cover the claims in this class action. And under these circumstances, I find that plaintiffs did not fully and fairly waive their rights to the claims in this class action complaint.

I find that this case is analogous to Chaponi or Chiapon, and the issues at stake in this

class action were, quote, not yet in dispute, end quote, at the time the general releases were executed.

Moreover, in this case there are additional reasons to conclude that the plaintiffs, as well as the City, did not intend to agree upon general releases that would prohibit claims for unknown injuries. These reasons include, one, the relatively low amounts that those cases were settled for; two, the City's own course of conduct; and three, the listing of the index numbers of those cases on the releases in the settled cases.

Therefore, as in Mangini, it would be inequitable to allow the releases to serve as a bar to this claim. Therefore, the City's challenge to exclude the signatories of general releases is denied.

Additionally, because the Court is only declining to enforce the interpretation of the releases proposed by the City and is not invalidating the underlying settlement agreements, there shall be no setoff of amounts previously received in those settlements, and the cases settled by those agreements are not to be reopened.

We'll turn next to the definition of

pretrial detainee.

The Court is left with the unavoidable conclusion that the parties intended to exclude those that were not exclusively pretrial detainees when they negotiated their proposed settlement. The City would have unique defenses, both with respect to liability and to damages for those already convicted and serving a sentence of incarceration. Even if people serving sentences could theoretically be included in the same class as pretrial detainees, there are strong reasons why the language in the settlement agreement would reasonably exclude those serving a sentence of incarceration.

Defendant is correct that in the cases cited by plaintiff, the courts interpreted the terms, quote, and/or in context and analyzed those agreements as a whole; see Kaufman, ^Fraternity, and Fairfield.

It is well settled that New York law prefers an interpretation of contract that gives words and phrases full meaning and effect over one that renders them meaningless; see Galley and Nautilus.

Plaintiffs' proposed interpretation would render the phrase "serving a sentence of

incarceration" superfluous, which is a result to be avoided under New York contract law; C. Picarelli.

Moreover, the Court finds that the Qhin, Q-H-I-N, data to be sufficient to demonstrate which potential class members are to be excluded.

For this reason, the City's challenge to exclude those already serving a sentence of incarceration is granted. But as I said previously, as the City conceded in its brief, the exclusion is only for the portion of the claim during which those claimants were actually serving a sentence of incarceration.

Lastly, I turn to plaintiffs' contagious disease unit challenges.

First, the Court determines that the City did have fair reasons to quarantine every single person who came into DOC's custody at the beginning of COVID. Nevertheless, that valid concern may not have justified placing every individual into near-solitary confinement conditions. Whether the City violated due process by placing every individual coming off the street into solitary-like confinement is not before the Court.

The only question before this Court is contractual, and here, the parties agreed that

challenges shall be deemed successful unless the medical records demonstrate that the person was housed in West Facility because they had been diagnosed with or were suspected of having contracted a contagious disease. If every newly admitted individual were deemed to be suspected of having contracted a contagious disease by virtue of the fact that they were a newly admitted individual, there would be nothing for the medical records to demonstrate, and the reference to medical records in the contract would be superfluous; see Picarelli. Therefore, notations to COVID clearance, without more, fail to demonstrate that the person was suspected of having contracted a contagious disease.

Turning to the specific challenges.

First, as to Michael Caraballo, the City emphasizes that Mr. Caraballo's medical records indicate that he was in CDU for COVID clearance. However, that notation was made on March 8th, and Mr. Caraballo tested negative on March 5th, and according to the City's submission, again on March 15th. The comment that he was there for COVID clearance paired with the negative tests is insufficient to demonstrate that he was suspected of having a contagious disease. So the challenge is

granted and Mr. Carabello will be included in the class.

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Next, as to Michael Masturzi, the records for Mr. Masturzi indicate an opioid OD, small, acute left occipital infarct. While individuals can certainly have COVID along with other medical problems, the records here indicate that he was placed in CDU due to the opioid overdose and the left occipital infarct, and not for having contracted or being suspected of having a contagious disease. Again, blanket COVID clearances are insufficient. This challenge is granted and Mr. Masturzi will be included in the class.

Next, as to Raheem Wilson, Mr. Wilson's records from September 2021 state: History of present illness. Patient with asthma, never vaxed. Last COVID, 6/21, negative. Known communicable disease requiring contact or airborne isolation influenza-like illness. There is clear indication in the medical records for Mr. Wilson that he was suspected of having contracted a contagious disease. So this challenge is denied, and Mr. Wilson is not in the class.

Next as to Joshua Morsiglio, per the medical records, Mr. Morsiglio tested negative for

COVID on May 6th and then refused to test on May 19th. He was then placed in CDU. The City cannot punish inmates who refuse to test by placing them in near-solitary confinement conditions. Mr. Morsiglio had tested negative and then refused further tests. Notably, there is no indication of symptoms or close contact with infected people in his medical records, and therefore no individualized suspicion that he had contracted a contagious disease. This challenge is granted, and Mr. Morsiglio will be included in the class.

Next, as to Rahim Ula, Mr. Ula's records include a notation, quote, for COVID clearance, and his records indicate that he was admitted for wound care. Thus, the medical records do not demonstrate that he was suspected of having contracted a contagious disease. As previously indicated, COVID clearance is insufficient, and here, there is a particularized reason that he was placed there, which is not on suspicion of contracting a contagious disease. So this challenge is granted, and Mr. Ula will be included in the class.

Last, as to Kadim Anderson, as above, as previously mentioned with Mr. Ula, Mr. Anderson's records indicate that he refused intake. Nothing in

the records indicate that he was under any suspicion of having contracted a contagious disease. This challenge is granted, and Mr. Anderson will be included in the class.

Finally, I'd like to finish by complimenting the excellent work by the attorneys on both sides. These were clearly complex and weighty issues, and the briefs were very well done and submitted on what was a very expedited timeline, and I appreciate that.

With that, and as I indicated, I will be following this up as soon as I get back upstairs with a very short order, which should close out a number of the open gavels. And in brief, we'll reiterate the rulings that I have made.

With that, is there anything further that we need to discuss on behalf of plaintiff?

MR. REINERT: Thank you, Your Honor.

There's a couple of clarifications I'd like to just get out and make sure we have them on the record.

Just first, to be clear, when the Court says this person is not included in the class, technically, I think what the Court needs to say is that CDU time will not be included in their compensation. Some of these individuals serve time

at other points where no one is arguing that they're not class members. I just want to make sure that's clear on the record.

The other thing is, there was one pretrial challenge that we noted in our paper, was submitted late by the City, and there was briefing on both sides on that issue; it's Mr. Foote, Mr. Enrique Foote. So I'm not -- you know, I don't know if the Court has considered that, and if not, it's obviously fine for the Court to make a determination as to that. But we, of course, hear the Court's ruling on the argument as to the pretrial challenges. But as to Mr. Foote, we had made a specific argument that it was late under the stipulation, which, of course, is separate from the question of whether or not he was a pretrial detainee or not when he served the time in question.

So that's just in terms of making sure that we have all of the -- whatever -- I's dotted and T's crossed.

And then, I just want to look forward for a moment, Your Honor.

As we had indicated in one of our letters to the Court, we did not present every class member challenge to the Court because we assumed that the

Court's resolution of the pending class member challenges would give enough guidance to us as counsel that we can move forward and figure them out. And I anticipate that this is sufficient, as I understand the Court's ruling.

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Of course, it is possible that -- and I'm ready to send to Mr. Scheiner our list of the challenges that remain, and how we think they should be resolved given the Court's resolution of the CDU issues. There's a timeframe for Mr. Scheiner to respond to that, and I'm going to be giving him all of the medical records and the specific references to that. Of course, I assume that we will be able to work it out; it's possible that we won't, in which case I think we would have to be back before the Court.

And I just appreciate the Court's careful attention to this case and -- and detailed attention to the case. As the Court is aware, once we get all this wrapped up, we can go to Judge Castel. So I am hopeful that we won't have to come back to the Court. But I'm just anticipating if, in case we do, we will -- we hope that we can get it resolved as quickly as possible.

The last issue of timing is with respect to

the pretrial challenges by the City that have been granted. The one thing we will need from the City, as a matter of timing -- and I would just appreciate Mr. Scheiner speaking to this -- is the City's specifics as to which days the City contends are covered by the pretrial challenges. Again, I don't think this should be a matter of dispute, but we don't have that yet from the City. Although we know what we think they are, we just haven't -- we don't have the specifics from the City.

So thank you.

THE COURT: And before you sit down, sir, there was a gentleman in the back who was raising his hand.

MR. REINERT: Mr. Vasquez is a class member, so it's to the --

THE COURT: I don't know. Just one moment. Perhaps you want to --

MR. REINERT: You want me to --

THE COURT: Well -- well, right, we

haven't -- well --

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MR. REINERT: I'll go have a -- I can go have a conversation, or -- I can go have a conversation with Mr. Vasquez.

I can put, on the record, Mr. Vasquez's

challenges is one of the ones that we were waiting for the Court's decision to guide us as to whether --

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further conversation with you about this to explain, but there were a couple of categories of challenges that were being made. And I think the idea between the parties was that how I would rule on some of those categories would then allow them to talk amongst themselves and say, well, this person, clearly, based on the logic of what I said, is in or is not, or this should count or this shouldn't. So instead of bringing every single issue before me, the idea was, you know, to get some -- right, to get some guidance.

So to the extent that you are someone that there be a particularized challenge or not about — it sounds like the parties now have some guidance about what category you should fall into. And they will then talk amongst themselves to see if they're in agreement about that. If they are, that's fine; if they're not, as plaintiffs' counsel has indicated, certainly they or the City is free to come back and say, here's some additional, you know, issues that we have in dispute. They may not need

to do that; they may be able to resolve remaining issues between the lawyers, but -- so to the extent that your particular challenge was -- was not heard today, sir, hopefully the rulings will give some guidance as to -- as to the fate of you as a potential claimant in the case.

MR. SCHEINER: Your Honor, if I may?
Yeah, defendants object to the plaintiff
essentially requesting reconsideration of the
Court's order by pointing to an argument that they
made in the papers that they thought that you didn't
address.

Our understanding is that the Court's decision is final. We didn't come here prepared for a re-argument of anything, and we think that's procedurally inappropriate to attempt.

THE COURT: And as to that, you're speaking with respect to Mr. Foote; is that correct, sir?

MR. SCHEINER: The assertion that the challenge was late, yes.

THE COURT: Right. So I -- with respect to the pretrial detention, I am making a blanket ruling there that folks who were serving a sentence for the period of time that they are serving the sentence -- * and you were certainly right to correct me on the --

I said it about the CDU folks, but I am not speaking as to broad class membership or not. And to the extent that I did, that was not my intention. I am talking about the period of time that somebody was serving a sentence, the period of time that folks were in CDU.

And so Mr. Foote is included in that blanket ruling with respect to if he was serving a concurrent sentence. So pretrial, but also serving a sentence.

MR. SCHEINER: And Mr. Reinert also mentioned something about what happens next and the timing of that. I think that is also beyond the scope of what the Court put on the agenda. We'll work as diligently as we can. I can't speak for what other people — other people's schedules, what they're going to be doing. And I'm not even sure why Mr. Reinert thinks there's any ambiguity about the issue he raised.

So I don't think that it's appropriate for the Court to try to set a schedule for any of that today. If the plaintiffs -- obviously they're not shy about raising complaints if they want to.

THE COURT: And plaintiffs' counsel will obviously correct me if I'm wrong. I did not hear

him saying he wanted to set a schedule. I just thought, and he can obviously chime in if I -- if I've gotten this wrong, that he was just sort of alerting me to the fact that it is possible that there might be some more work for me to do on the case in the event that now -- that you sort of have your marching orders in terms of the rulings I have made, I did not hear him as asking to set a schedule, and I -- and I hadn't intended to do so.

My thought from what I'm hearing is that you and -- plaintiffs' counsel and you, sir, will sort of get together, figure out what periods of time are in, out, who's in, who's out, and to the extent that there is something then that I need to rule on, that one or the other side would bring that back to me.

MR. SCHEINER: Yes, Your Honor.

And in case this is an oversight by the plaintiffs -- they would never make an oversight, Your Honor. I just want to flag for the Court, medical information was discussed about individuals. I don't know if that's -- plaintiffs intend that to be public or not, but I just wanted to flag that as something that may require redaction. I think that's up to the plaintiffs.

Thank you, Your Honor.

MR. REINERT: Yeah, I think that's right. We might have to redact some specific assets -- ask that certain aspects of the transcript be redacted.

I do want to just get back to Mr. Foote, just so I understand the Court's -- the Court's ruling.

I wasn't -- I did not mean to ask for a reconsideration or that argument to be reconsidered. I was just ensuring that, if that's the Court's ruling, obviously we have agreed that it be final. So if the Court's ruling was that the challenge to Mr. Foote's -- the pretrial challenge to Mr. Foote is encompassed within the Court's resolution of the pretrial challenge, and therefore that our objection that the challenge was untimely has been rejected, then I just want to make sure that that's clear. And I'm not asking for reconsideration of anything.

THE COURT: In terms of the transcript, I do think that -- I'm going to interpret what you've said as being that, yes, you are requesting those portions be redacted. And so I think the mechanism by which that happens is someone orders the transcript, and then you review it; you say what portion should be redacted. And I agree that

1 obviously medical information was discussed, and 2 that is information that is appropriately redacted from the public record. And so I am -- I hear your 3 request for redaction and I grant that. And to 4 effectuate that happening, again, someone needs to 5 order a copy of the transcript so that the proposed 6 7 redactions can be sent to the transcription folks. 8 Is there anything else that we need to discuss? 9 10 And I am correct, right, sir, that you were 11 not trying to set a schedule? 12 MR. REINERT: Oh no, I was just asking if 13 Mr. Scheiner was willing to tell us when he might be 14 willing -- might be able to give us anything. 15 In any event -- but I don't mean to be, in any way, pushing. I just want to -- I just want to 16 17 know with respect to Mr. Foote, has the challenge 18 been granted notwithstanding our plan? 19 Okay. 20 THE COURT: Yes. 21 Thank you, Your Honor. MR. REINERT: 22 That is correct. THE COURT: MR. SCHEINER: Your Honor, just a 23

clarification about the transcript.

Occasionally -- I could be wrong -- when a

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transcript is prepared, you know, for review, the court reporter will essentially post it on the docket, sometimes publicly, sometimes saying you can order it if you want it. And I think based on what we discussed at the beginning, that it would be best if the transcript was not posted on the docket in that way, but made available for redactions in case somebody were to order it, which is within their, you know, power.

were suggesting essentially would be saying that we order a copy but place it under seal. And I don't know that, in keeping with the ruling that Judge Castel had previously made about -- I don't know that the sort of requirements for something to be placed under seal would be met, and I'm not -- you sort of can't do proposed redactions without having the transcript to kind of know what the sections are to redact.

So I understand your concern that sort of once it's ordered, then it's there. And to the extent that we're trying to minimize the public footprint of the ruling, I'm not -- unless counsel has a suggestion, not sure how we could then effectuate that.

MR. REINERT: Well, I'll make two points.

With respect to redactions, it's straightforward. It's what we did with the last transcript.

With respect to the ruling, as far as we've agreed that it doesn't have precedential effect; we've agreed that we're not going to submit it to court reporting service. We didn't agree that this was going to be a secret proceeding.

THE COURT: Which is why I'm not putting it under seal.

MR. REINERT: It's a public proceeding, and the Court's reasoning is public. So I don't know what the basis would be for sealing the entire transcript as opposed to sealing the portions of the transcript that refer to individual's medical records.

MR. SCHEINER: Your Honor, defendants aren't requesting sealing. It's just that, if there's a choice about whether the transcript be posted for anyone to download without paying, we're requesting that that not be the case. Obviously, if somebody wants to get the transcript and pay for it, they have that right.

THE COURT: Right, so I don't -- I mean, I

think the mechanism -- so in order for the recording to be reduced to a transcript, which can then be reviewed and then marked for proposed redactions, either plaintiffs' counsel or you, sir, or I suppose the Court would have to order it. That puts it on the docket with a hyperlink. But that is still -- and it's my understanding that someone other than counsel and the Court to access that, they click on it and have to pay.

So I don't -- this isn't a -- this isn't a -- we're not, you know, publicly putting a PDF out there. It would be available in the way that any transcript of an open proceeding is available.

MR. SCHEINER: That's what I wanted to check. In other words, somebody else will have to pay for it. That's the order.

THE COURT: That is absolutely my understanding. I don't know why there would be any difference with respect to that.

So with that, is there anything more?

MR. REINERT: No, thank you, Your Honor.

THE COURT: In that case -- in that case,

we'll be adjourned.

CERTIFICATE I, Marissa Lewandowski, certify that the foregoing transcript of proceedings in the case of MILLER, et al v. CITY OF NEW YORK, et al, Docket #1:21-cv-02616-PKC-JW, was prepared using digital transcription software and is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. Signature Marissa Lewandowski Marissa Lewandowski October 16, 2024 Date: